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# The Washington Times

## China builds its own high-tech military

*New capabilities, independence from Russia put U.S., Asia on another playing field*

By Reuben F. Johnson

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**BEIJING** | [China's military\(/topics/chinas-military/\)](#) is nearly self-sufficient in building advanced weaponry following decades of importing aircraft, ships, submarines and missile technology, mainly from [Russia\(/topics/russia/\)](#), and the capability is raising new fears of Chinese military hegemony in Asia and arms exports to rogue states.

New capabilities to produce high-tech arms means defense policymakers in the Asia Pacific and in Washington are being forced to adjust their strategies for dealing with the emerging power of the communist nation's military forces over the next three to five years, according to defense analysts in the West and Asia.

In addition, [China\(/topics/china/\)](#)'s increasing independence from Russian imports of defense technology will allow Beijing to export a raft of high-tech weapons to nations that seek modern-day armaments but cannot purchase what they want from [U.S.\(/topics/united-states-of-america/\)](#) or European suppliers.

Countries buying Chinese weapons will not be in the position that [Iran\(/topics/islamic-republic-of-iran/\)](#) was in the 1980s, when it purchased low-tech Silkworm anti-ship missiles from Beijing: They were not an optimal solution for the Iranians, but it was all the Chinese defense industry could offer.

Today, if [Iran\(/topics/islamic-republic-of-iran/\)](#) wanted a modern air force backed up by air defense systems, anti-ship missiles and radar networks, it could purchase them from [China\(/topics/china/\)](#) tomorrow.

"It is somewhat of a tragic story when you look back more than 20 years," a Russian defense analyst, who was once a senior engineer at one of Moscow's most important military enterprises, told [The Washington Times\(/topics/the-washington-times/\)](#). "After the end of the Cold War and when [Russia\(/topics/russia/\)](#) was going through some very difficult economic times — defense industry here indicated their very clear preference to work with their [U.S.\(/topics/united-states-of-america/\)](#) counterparts, but most of these plans never were realized.

"When the [U.S.\(/topics/united-states-of-america/\)](#) more or less took a pass on working with Russian industry, the heads of all of our defense enterprises that were full of hungry, unpaid employees had no place to go other than to work with the Chinese."

Beijing went on a defense spending spree, purchasing from [Russia\(/topics/russia/\)](#) a wide array of high-tech weaponry, including fighter jets, attack helicopters and missile systems. Chinese engineers then copied the designs of these arms to create Beijing's own line of modern warfare tools — such as the J-11B fighter jet, which is a copy of the Russian Su-27SK aircraft.

What's more, Chinese engineers have been modifying designs to improve some weapon systems. The Moscow-based Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, a private defense and foreign policy think tank, reported recently that [China's military\(/topics/chinas-military/\)](#) has developed a modification of the engine that powers the Su-27SK fighter jet that extends the operational life of the

engine from 900 flight hours to 1,500 flight hours — a noteworthy achievement in aerospace technology.

The Russian defense analyst said the [U.S./topics/united-states-of-america/](#) deserves some blame for his country's contribution to [China/topics/china/](#)'s emerging defense industry. "[The] shortsightedness by the U.S. government in the 1990s has come back to haunt them.

"The [U.S./topics/united-states-of-america/](#) could have put its hands on a cornucopia of defense technology for very reasonable money, but instead Washington laid the foundation for [China/topics/china/](#) to become a modern military power in a rather short time — something that would never have happened so quickly without [Russia/topics/russia/](#)'s assistance," he said. "It will cost America far much more in the long run now to counter [China/topics/china/](#)'s increasingly capable defense posture than it would have to just buy up what was available from [Russia/topics/russia/](#) in the early 1990s."

The [Republic of China/topics/china/](#) (Taiwan) is wishing the [U.S./topics/united-states-of-america/](#) had been more prescient.

A Defense Intelligence Agency report disclosed that Taiwan's air force has only 350 aircraft, many of them aging Northrop F-5s and 20-year-old Lockheed Martin F-16A/B models. Arrayed against them within striking distance from the mainland are more than 450 of [China/topics/china/](#)'s top-line J-10, J-11 and Su-30MKK fighters, which outclass most of Taiwan's aircraft.

In addition, thanks to the transfer of precision guidance technology from [Russia/topics/russia/](#) to [China/topics/china/](#), about 1,300 short-range ballistic missiles are targeted from [China/topics/china/](#) against most of Taiwan's air force installations.

Specialists from Taiwan's military based in Taipei told [the Washington Times/topics/the-washington-times/](#) that the assumption by defense officials on the island is that most of the air force facilities — including the runways — would be destroyed before the force could get off the ground. "The only aircraft to be airborne would be those already on patrol, but they would have no place to land," said one analyst who has visited Taiwanese air force bases and interacts regularly with the Taiwanese military.

Taipei is seeking to purchase from Washington a shipment of newer F-16s, especially the more advanced F-16C/D Block 50+ variant, but the Obama administration has not granted the request. Also, another request for a badly needed upgrade of the older F-16A/B models already in service with the Chinese air force is not on the table.

Analysts who have focused on [China/topics/china/](#)'s People's Liberation Army say there is no mechanism for taking away the technology [China/topics/china/](#) has assimilated from [Russia/topics/russia/](#). "The genie is out of the bottle," one analyst said.

There is also little question that the PLA is "feeling its oats. That it has come into its own with an entire lineup of high-tech weapons at a time when [China/topics/china/](#) is becoming the world's second largest economy — and when [China/topics/china/](#) is the one nation in the world that is not afflicted with anemic economic performance," said a senior academic at Peking University's prestigious School of International Relations.

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